

I Chronicles 4:9-10 What are you asking for from God?

Introduction

We all have our favourite stories or sections of the Bible when reading through the Scriptures. Is there anyone here who places the early chapters of genealogies in I Chronicles high up on your list of favourites? I could ask the question with absolute confidence that probably none of us is naturally drawn to lists of names and details about unknown people. The first nine chapters of I Chronicles are a family tree of the tribes of Israel from Adam through to those who returned from captivity in Babylon approximately five centuries before the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. However, the unknown author of this record of Jewish history was inspired to stop his listing of names and give the shortest of accounts of an unknown (to us) man called Jabez. This is what he recorded in I Chronicles 4:9-10: *Jabez was more honourable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, 'I gave birth to him in pain.'* ¹⁰ *Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request.* What was it about this ordinary individual that God wants us both to know and respond to in our own daily experiences? How can his simple prayer offer some relevance to our lives millennia later in the 21st century?

1. You must start where you are (I Chronicles 4:9b)

His mother had named him Jabez, saying, 'I gave birth to him in pain.' There is clearly information hinted at here about the circumstances of his birth that led to some disadvantages for him and possibly also for his mother. The reason I am confident in making this statement is due to the choice of name for this baby boy. In that culture names were normally chosen by the father rather than the mother. This practice continued for many centuries. Remember in the New Testament at the time when John the Baptist was circumcised. Due to Zechariah's temporary loss of speech Elizabeth was speaking on behalf of the family at that special service. When she was asked the name by which the child would be known her unexpected response 'John' was immediately questioned and a writing tablet was sought to allow Zechariah the father to confirm or deny the response Elizabeth had given. (Luke 1:57-66). Why did Jabez's father not want to bother naming his son? This historical time period is early in Israel's history. He lived in the southern part of Israel after the conquest of Canaan during the time of the Judges, as a member of the tribe of Judah. Although he was probably not the eldest son in the family there is a suggestion that he rose to become the leading figure in the family in later life - *Jabez was more honourable than his brothers* (I Chronicles 4:9a). However, why was his mother left to name him? And why did she choose the name Jabez (Pain). In a cultural and religious context where the meaning of names was of huge significance –unlike in our own culture today, how did she expect her son to handle being called 'pain' at school and throughout his adult life? It is my conviction, and can only be that, that this was a problem birth which led to some physical or other challenges for Jabez in his life. Maybe it was so serious that he wasn't even expected to live for very long and as a result was just about written off by his father –and maybe other people as well. Jabez probably won't make it, but even if he does his life won't accomplish very much!

Each one of us is special and valuable. At the very beginning of the Bible our significance is underlined in Genesis 1:26-27: ²⁶*Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’* ²⁷*So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.* If you believe you can accomplish nothing with your life then it is not difficult to fulfil such a belief. By contrast, if you grasp the significance of those words from Genesis 1 and realise the potential and gifting God has entrusted to you to accomplish things for Him then it opens up a whole new world of possibilities. The question then becomes –how can I best use the gifts and time I have to accomplish the most good for God and for the benefit of other people? This, then leads on to look at our expectations; what expectations do you have of God doing great things in Broughty Ferry in the next few years? What expectation do you have of God doing great things through **you** in this church this year or next year? Or is the answer that you haven’t prayed about it or haven’t got any faith expectations? Or can you say – yes I have thought about it and I am praying that God will do.... this year? To often God fulfils our expectations – nothing expected! – What should we be asking from God for this year that would bring glory to Him? What faith expectations do you have of what He can accomplish through you? Did Jesus not say in Matthew 7:7-8: *Keep on asking and you will be given what you ask for; keep on looking and you will find; keep on knocking and the door will be opened.* What are you asking for? What are you seeking? What are you knocking for on the door of heaven – do you have any tangible requests to bring to the Lord?

2. You must ask the right person (I Chronicles 4:10a)

And Jabez cried out to the God of Israel’v10a; It seems obvious! How often do we make our complaints to other people and express to them our aspirations – without taking them to God. Jabez could have made a New Years’ resolution to harness the “power of positive thinking” - to believe that he could do anything he wanted; or he could have gone on a self-assertion course to build his inner self-confidence. There are some people who may need this kind of support, but for this enthusiastic young man there was one particular course of action to take. Jabez turned to the One Person who could make the difference he sought in His life – is that not sensible? There is a time and a place to seek to work with other people –and we can accomplish far more together than any of us can accomplish on our own- but too often in Western Christianity we forget to turn to the Lord in prayer and request His wisdom and guidance; His strength and support in whatever endeavour we are seeking to pursue; How does Paul pray in Ephesians 3:20-21 (NKJV) for that church: *‘Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us, to Him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.’* or *‘He is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope..’*(NLV) Why should Paul pray like that – unless His God – your God, my God – is able and willing to do more than we have sought from Him up to now? Is it sensible just to ask God to do minor things / little things, when He is able to do more than we can even **imagine**? The question we need to ask ourselves is this: If God guaranteed to fulfil one God-honouring request from me in prayer –what would I be asking from Him? What might we as a congregation be asking from Him under those terms –if united we asking Him as His people? Have you ever asked these kinds of questions? Doing nothing is never an option in God’s work. If the Early Church had taken that line then the Roman Empire would not have had the Gospel proclaimed through all its

major cities within a generation. If the great missionary pioneers of the 1790s had taken that line of doing nothing, more than two-thirds of the countries of the world that have growing Christian Churches right now might never have heard the good news for themselves. Are you / Are we asking the right person to determine our priorities? It is not asking God to fit in with our agenda or for Him to send into our midst only people we feel comfortable with right now. It is saying: Lord, You are the head of this church. You will determine our future. Help me, help us to keep in step with what You are doing and what You want us to be doing in the future. May we never confuse our preferences with Your purposes; may we be kept from having too impoverished a vision of what can be accomplished in this district in the power of Your Holy Spirit.

3. **You must be the right person** (I Chronicles 4:9a)

Jabez who was more distinguished than any of his brothers; Jabez was not better looking than his brothers; he was not in possession of more material goods than his brothers; he was not more prominent socially than his brothers – he may even have been the youngest brother – ‘little Jabez’. So why was it that he was considered by the author of I Chronicles ‘*more distinguished*’ than his brothers? In the records of Kings and Chronicles people were not esteemed highly because of worldly success, but on the sole criteria of their relationship with God. Did they know the Lord? Did they seek to put Him first in their lives? Did a desire to see Him honoured and glorified reveal itself as their number one ambition in life? Robert Murray McCheyne of St Peter’s Free Church, Dundee, in the nineteenth century, said: ‘A man is what he is on his knees before God and nothing else.’ In the sight of God Jabez lived a life that brought Him more glory. Remember the words of James 5:16b ‘*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*’ (NKJV) Now it is most interesting that James 5:16 begins with: ‘*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed*’, prior to the description of effective prayer. Now we know from Psalm 66:18 which states that ‘*If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened*’, so unconfessed sin can be a barrier to blessing, though we do not need to speak automatically to another person unless our sin is against them, rather we can settle our accounts directly with God. It is serious though that an individual, a family or a church family can miss the blessing God has for them if there is unconfessed sin a person or persons in the midst are unwilling to confess. When the Israelites entered the land under Joshua’s leadership there was an extraordinary supernatural act of God that caused the city of Jericho to fall into their hands. Yet the village of Ai down the road was a huge problem. Why? There were prayer times held by the leaders of the nation (Joshua 7:6-9), but the problem remained until God spoke into their midst, calling them to deal with the problem in their midst before they could receive the promised inheritance in the land. Joshua 7:10-13 states: *The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?’* ¹¹ *Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions.* ¹² *That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you any more unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.* ¹³ *‘Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, “Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: there are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.* Prayer is vital but so is the necessary action to remove sin problems however they manifest themselves amongst God’s people. Do we individually or

collectively have any issues that need to be addressed in order to release the blessing of God upon us in coming days? If we have, will we have the courage to put right what needs to be sorted out to the glory of God? I thank God for the many people in this congregation who have been at different times of great help to others on their spiritual journey. I thank God also for the prayer ministry team in the church who are willing to serve God's people in this very practical way Sunday by Sunday. If God has spoken to you and you want someone to pray with you then they are willing to assist you.

The key word in James 5:16, a passage that speaks of the efficacy of prayer, is a '**righteous** person' – one whose heart has pure motivation in what they are seeking from God. Psalm 24:3-5 says: '*Who may climb the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? Only those whose hands and heart are pure...They will receive the Lord's blessing and have right standing (righteousness NKJV) with God their saviour.*' This is not a select group of Christians who can meet this criteria – all believers whose hearts are right with God can be candidates for the blessing. The only issue at stake here for Christians is this- am I seeking God's glory as my number one goal – do I want what God wants? Can I pray, motivate me Father to seek the things that are on your heart so that I may become so in tune with You that I may see miracles of answered prayer that bring even more honour to Your name, and even in this community where I live?

4. **You must pray enthusiastically** (I Chronicles 4:10a)

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that You would bless me (indeed NKJV)'; v10a Remember the words quoted from James 5:16: '*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person*' – Does it matter enough to you that God answers **your** prayers? Too often we fail to put enough zeal into our prayers – I say that of my praying too – we pray for so long and when little- if anything – is happening we still pray but our enthusiasm has dimmed. Turn to Genesis 32:22-30, here is Jacob the conman who has lived by his wits keeping one step ahead of the latest person he has wronged – he is a believer but of the kind you wouldn't mention as a church member to your neighbours – in cast they knew him and wondered why he was part of your church family with his reputation! God encounters Jacob in a way that he will never forget –a strange story in some respects of a wrestling match – yet the key moment is at the end of many hours of toil – *I will not let you go unless You bless me! "What is your name?" the man asked?" He replied "Jacob". "Your name will no longer be called Jacob" (deceiver) the man told him. It is now Israel (Prince with God); because you have struggled with both God and men and have won (prevailed NKJV).* How much does it matter? Will you covenant with God to pray earnestly this year and into the future for the issues that He lays on your heart – not resting until you see His answers to those prayers?

5. **You must pray specifically** (I Chronicles 4:10b)

Oh that You would bless me and extend my lands v10b There are two elements to his prayer- first of all it was a prayer for himself that was highlighted in this passage. There can be a danger that sometimes we are so busy praying for all the needs of other people –which is right and proper, and something that too often we neglect to do often enough, but there can be occasions when for whatever reason we fail to pray enough regarding our own circumstances. Could it be happening for you in a situation which you are not praying earnestly about – because you fear a negative answer and do not wish to be disappointed – but God may be wanting to say 'yes' to your request

and your lack of requests to God is hindering the gift of the blessing. Does James 4:2 apply to anyone here: *you do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it?* Secondly, it was prayer for more extensive ministry opportunities; that's a bit frightening if we are already struggling with doing what is currently our service for the Lord! Does the Lord not know that? Notice here the most **important** point in his petition: "He left it entirely up to God to decide what the blessing would be and where, when and how Jabez would receive them." (Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*, p.24) This kind of praying has **nothing** in common with the self-centred prosperity theology that looks at making us better off materially in a world where half the population is merely existing, but **all** to do with seeking to be the person God desires us to be and who can give the most glory and honour to Him, through the way we live.

Andrew Fuller, the great Baptist pastor and theologian in the late-eighteenth century, at the time of the launch of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in 1792, preached a sermon on Isaiah 54:2-3: *Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.* (NKJV) This is very similar in Isaiah 54:2 to the prayer of Jabez – Fuller prophetically used this text to describe the Evangelical missionary movement spearheaded by the BMS – they claimed the entire world for Jesus by the year 2000 and had the zeal and determination of the early pioneers been matched in successive generations it was an achievable though fantastic goal! Don't forget to pray big petitions! What specific things will we pray for with respect to the extension of God's kingdom in this district in the next few years? If that handful of Christian leaders in a small network of Baptist Churches could claim the world for Christ, despite not knowing a single missionary or possessing the means to pay for the cost of sending pioneers overseas, then is it too much for us to pray big petitions for the extension of God's kingdom in this district? I hope not!

6. **You must pray honestly** (I Chronicles 4:10c)

...that Your hand would be with me (NKJV) v10c or *please be with me in all that I do* (NLV); Do you believe you can do it in your own strength? Could Elijah cause drought in Israel for three and a half years in his own strength? (I Kings 17; James 5:17) Did Peter's great natural fearlessness and eloquence convert 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost? Did you do anything you have done of great significance in your own strength alone? (No!) Zechariah 4:6 reminds us forcefully: *It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord Almighty.* Remember Moses' plea in Exodus 33:15: *'Moses said to Him, "If You do not go with us personally, do not let us move a step from this place.'* Did you realise that the Great Commission (*all the world*) is an impossible task – but Jesus offered incredible resources (*I am with you always*) so that it will be fulfilled!! Have you or have I either been too confident in our abilities that we felt we could manage fine on our own and the Lord could be busy helping more needy Christians, even though we would not put it like that! Or have we prayed only for little things that we felt were within our resources – of course with God's help! Is the challenge in this case to say –Lord this is on my heart I want You to do this – but I, and our church, cannot possibly do this if you answer my prayer - we do not have the resources to cope – so You will have to do a mighty supernatural miracle to enable us to cope, we will have to depend totally on You!! God appreciates such honesty and

the awareness that we have got beyond our limits – but in faith we will pledge to pray beyond our resources!! Or will we?

7. **You must pray realistically** (I Chronicles 4:10d)

...and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain (NKJV); or in the NLV *...and keep me from all trouble and pain*. If the original text can be translated to mean either –surely God intends it to be both for us and other people! In the USA a few years ago there was an advert in a magazine that showed a picture of a Roman gladiator in an amphitheatre in big trouble. He was being charged by a lion and he had dropped his sword and was running for his life. The caption said: ‘Sometimes you can afford to come in second. Sometimes you cannot.’ There are people today who once served Jesus with significant success in this and other Bible-believing churches no longer even in any church, and there are other men and women who were successful in ministry who are no longer in their spheres of service; why? because we are in a spiritual battle; In the disciples prayer that Jesus taught us to pray there is the phrase: *...And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil One* (Matthew 6:13). If the devil thinks that you are going to play a vital role in the work of the Lord in the church this year or in some future year he will do his evil best to get you to quit or to use some person or persons inside or outside of the church to undermine you, so that you cannot do what God had planned for you. The greater the impact you are having for God the greater the difficulties the devil will endeavour to place in your path. Given the obstacles in the paths of some people in this church God must have some extraordinary plans of blessing that He wants to pour out in our midst! Paul reminded the Corinthians about the spiritual battle in II Corinthians 10:4: *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary they have divine power to demolish strongholds*. Remember also I John 4:4 *The [Holy] Spirit who lives in you is greater than the [evil] spirit who lives in the world*. Be encouraged and resolve to stand for the Lord and to go forward as He leads us in the power of His Spirit.

Conclusion – *And God granted him his request* (I Chronicles 4:10:e) What will be the results in coming months and years from now regarding the petitions we will bring to God as He lays them on our hearts this week and in coming days? In faith may this be true for each person present in this church, to the praise of His glory, Amen.